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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3333
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 2206
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0035

UNCLAS BAGHDAD 001467

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [OIIP](#) [SCUL](#) [EINTECPS](#) [TINT](#) [KPAO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: Iraqi Technology Task Force Launches, Ready to Produce

¶1. Summary: Thanks to the catalyst provided by the April visit to Iraq of U.S. high tech executives as part of a TechDel led by S/P's Jared Cohen, and at the behest of Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, the Iraqi Technology Task Force (ITTF) formed in early May to seek ways to empower Iraqis to use new media. DPM Salih energized the genesis of the ITTF and mandated the ITTF serve as the liaison in Iraq to the Support Network for a Digital Iraq (SNDI), the U.S. portal that S/P is developing with the TechDel members. The ITTF has met several times, agreed on its mission statement and developed a logo and web site that will be on the web within days to signal the ITTF's official beginning. On May 27, S/P Cohen hosted a video conference with the ITTF members and the group followed that on May 28 by meeting with DPM Barham to report on the ITTF's activities and pass on an update from the SNDI. End Summary.

ITTF: Going Where No TF Has Gone Before

¶2. The Iraqi Technology Task Force (TTF) is a public-private partnership that formed in early May and over a series of meetings, developed its mission statement with its mandate, "to empower the Iraqi people." (Note: Full text of mission statement below. End Note.) With a diverse and talented membership made up of leaders from the public and private sphere, the ITTF is set to serve not only as liaison to the SNDI, but will also work to use the tools of new media to improve Iraq. It is co-chaired by a private businessman, Farhad Alaaldin, and DG Mahmood Sharief from the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST). Emboffs from PAS and Econ sit on the ITTF as advisory members and ACAO serves as liaison between the SNDI and the ITTF.

ITTF: We See Your "YouTube" and Raise You "Click"

¶3. In addition to several projects the ITTF is currently working on in concert with members of the SNDI (National Museum web site, GOI YouTube Channel, internships, etc) the ITTF hopes to also hold a conference in mid-November in Baghdad with the assistance of the SNDI. The ITTF plans to invite some of the leading technology companies from the SNDI and also link in companies from other tech-savvy countries with interest in Iraq. The ITTF is developing a draft conference program and will include a session on how new media can help politicians campaign. The ITTF also hopes to work with leading Iraqi TV station Al-Iraqiya to develop a program that would be modeled after BBC's "Click" a five-minute high technology program. The ITTF is working to secure five minutes of airtime for the Iraqi "Click" program just before the 8 o'clock news. The SNDI could offer U.S. tech executives as interview subjects for the "Click" as well as offer advice and content for the micro-show that would help educate Iraqis about latest technology trends.

ITTF Mission: Not Impossible

¶4. The ITTF has adopted the following as its mission statement: "TTF is a Public-Private partnership that seeks to harness the digital world to empower the Iraqi people. It seeks to foster transparency, accountability, and good governance in Iraq. TTF seeks to fulfill its mandate by encouraging greater use of the internet and raising awareness of its unparalleled commercial and social networking capacity and its role in developing civil society." The activities

of the ITTF will be defined further as projects are defined and focus areas set. The ITTF will also serve as the all-important liaison and eyes and ears in Iraq for the SNDI.

ITTF Meets S/P, NEA

¶5. On May 27 the members of the ITTF connected via video conference with S/P's Jared Cohen along with representatives from NEA. Mr. Cohen complimented the members of the ITTF on how quickly they had assembled and moved into action. He explained what the Support Network for Digital Iraq (SNDI) was and what it hoped to do and noted there was immense interest generated in the SNDI by the TechDel's visit to Iraq. Moving ahead, Mr. Cohen hopes to develop a joint virtual presence to make "meetings" easier using the tools of the internet. He highlighted the strong support from the Secretary the ITTF and SNDI enjoy. The ITTF members thanked Cohen for his update and several told emboffs after the meeting that they were encouraged by the progress in Washington and heartened by the expression of support.

DPM Barham: Eyes Wide Open

¶6. On May 28, DPM Barham Salih told the ITTF members and emboffs that the April visit of the TechDel had "opened his eyes," to the potential of new media to help the GOI as well as the people and culture of Iraq. He encouraged the ITTF to establish an internet presence and formalize the ITTF with regular meetings, formulate a charter that defines the role of the ITTF as well as the roles of individual members, submit ideas to his office for new policy initiatives, and continue work to deliver specific accomplishments in the near term. Youth should play a prominent role in the ITTF, he emphasized. To further the goals and fulfill the mandate of the ITTF, DPM Barham offered his help and encouraged the ITTF members to use his office as a resource and pledged he would use his considerable influence freely to ensure the GOI did not impede the progress of the ITTF. Emboff passed a message to DPM Barham from the Secretary of State, noting that many were following his tweets, indicating U.S. looked forward to an equal partnership between the SNDI and the ITTF to empower the Iraqi people using the tools of new media, and assuring the DPM that the Secretary was personally engaged with this initiative.

Not Out of the Woods Yet

¶7. The ITTF is not incorporated legally so in the weeks ahead, the group must decide on how to incorporate, as an NGO or as an attachment to a GOI entity, either the DPM's office or the MoST. While DPM Salih has repeatedly assured us he will continue to support the ITTF's efforts no matter his political future, it is crucial the ITTF develop into a robust, self-sustaining institution that will not depend on political backing from a particular politician or political group.

Comment

¶8. The ITTF's potential to address systemic problems in Iraq across various sectors (cultural, political, educational, etc) in a dynamic and innovative way is virtually unlimited if the ITTF succeeds in finding consistent political patronage after DPM Barham leaves Baghdad and if the SNDI is able to contribute in an active, significant and continued way. The exciting part of this initiative is that we have in place, in Iraq and the U.S., components to drive this initiative with limited financial commitment from the USG or the GOI. Further guidance and support from the USG, however, is crucial to help us successfully launch the ITTF so it can produce results and gain needed credibility as the nascent organization struggles to find its footing in Iraq's challenging business and political environment. End Comment.

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